


Ge Builder.

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SATURDAY, JUNE 19, 1847.



VENTS wait for the right moment and the right man. An idea conceived, a proposal made, a reform demanded, may be at first disregarded or abused; even after the lapse of years responded to by few; yet, ultimately, when propounded at a distant period, find universal response and be carried out by common consent. Any of our great reforms would serve as an illustration:—our social progress has so gone on. To honour the heroes of peace was at first a wild notion entertained by individuals only, but it has grown and widened, and is now becoming generally desired, though scarcely to such an extent in our own country, even yet, as in those around it. Still the feeling is increasing, and it may be expected that in a score of years from this time, the result will be a crowd of statues of England's great men, to perpetuate their memory, exalt the character of the country, refine, and elevate the rising generation, and incite to a generous emulation in noble doings.

We would have every valuable book in the metropolis filled by a statue; the centre of our squares, the intersection of wide roads, the piers of our bridges, the halls of our public buildings, should present the lineaments and the mind, in enduring marble, bronze, or stone, of all our "great captains" in the fight between light and darkness, ignorance and wisdom, human happiness and misery. Nor should this be confined to the metropolis;—our provincial towns (many of them larger and more important than some states), should adopt the same course, and in addition to men of all times and all nations, set up especially their own notables, to honour the past and stimulate the coming.

Let our sculptors prepare for it: the day wherein these things will be done is approaching.

Reverting to the remark with which we commented this paper, Mrs. S. C. Hall, Mr. Charles Knight, and probably other writers before them, have urged the claims of William Caxton, the first English printer, to the honour of a national memorial. "Cologne," said Mr. Knight in 1844, when speaking of the city where the printer learnt his art, "rendered the name of Caxton a bright and venerable name—a name that even his countrymen, who are accustomed chiefly to raise columns and statues to the warlike defenders of their country, will one day honour amongst the heroes who have most successfully cultivated the arts of peace, and by high talent and patient labour, have rendered it impossible that mankind should not steadily advance in the acquisition of knowledge and virtue, and in the consequent amelioration of the lot of every member of the family of mankind at some period, present or remote."

But the moment was not come, and the suggestion was disregarded.

The Rev. Mr. Milman has fallen upon a better time. Availing himself of the proposed improvements in Westminster, he addressed his proposal to the distinguished nobleman at the head of the Board of Works, and no sooner

had it appeared, than the whole of the periodical press declared in its favour and advocated its immediate adoption.

A public meeting to promote it, held in the great room of the Society of Arts, on Saturday last, was numerously attended, and all there seemed most anxious to further the suggestion.*

Lord Morpeth, who was in the chair, made an eloquent address,—tasteful, elegant, and convincing. Many of our readers have already seen reports of what was said on that occasion through the columns of the daily press ; it may, nevertheless, be useful to record some few of the observations, and the arrangements that were made. After acknowledging the worth of the reverend gentleman from whom the proposition emanated, the chairman traced the life of Caxton, shewing that it was as a sojourner at the Court of Bruges, and in the train of the English Margaret of Burgundy, that his attention must have been attracted to the progress of that memorable discovery, in the noble cities of Germany, which has been calculated, above all others, to affect the progress of society and the destinies of our race. There his ingenuity must have been exercised in those practical details and mechanical contrivances connected with the art, the difficulties and expense of which we at this day are perhaps hardly able to calculate.

Many of our warriors," said his lordship, "many of our statesmen, many of our ages, and many of our poets, have not wanted the votive marble or the commemorative statue, but I would beg to remind you how much every one of these has been indebted to that art with which William Caxton's name is for ever connected. Of that art, however, it is the main value and the first boast that it does not confine its benefits to the distinguished few, to the favourites of fortune, or to the idols of society, but that it penetrates, and gladdens, and enriches the masses and the many. It is true that Homer and Plato, that Virgil and Cicero, attained their celebrity and their empire over the minds of men, before the existence of printing-presses, but it is the newspaper of every breakfast table, the Shakespeare in every village library, the bible in every poor man's cottage, it is the English primer among the wilds of Australia, the English hymn-book on the broad streams of the Missouri—these are the glorious products and the triumphs of printing. It is possible that in our own day—in deed, I need not talk of it now as a possibility—the electric telegraph may make the

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operation of printing proceed with the rapidity of the lightning; but by honoring the first introducer of that great invention we shall be setting the best example to succeeding races of our countrymen to pay the debt which, in its turn, may become due to all the lengthened series of great discoveries. I believe, that ten years only have elapsed since the men of Germany have amply redeemed the obligation which undoubtedly rested upon them, by erecting a statue to Gutenberg in his own town of Mayence, and I believe that the genius of Thorwaldsen was enlisted to mould the enduring marble to that great benefactor of his species. I think it is full time, that England should now show, that she feels how much she owes to the agency of the first English printer. Therefore, it is with no doubtful or hesitating feeling, that I call upon the citizens of this great metropolis, upon the inhabitants of this flourishing kingdom, upon the subjects of our extended empire, to pay the debt which they confess to be due to the merits and the fame of William Caxton. The exact nature and details of the monument, which your benevolence may enable us to rear, may be left for more mature, and, possibly, for more select consideration. But it appears to me, that the idea suggested by Mr. Milman, of making the monument of the first English printer indicative of the enlightening and purifying principles of his art, is a very happy one. But at all events, we shall all agree, that the proposed site of the monument is eminently appropriate. There let it stand, close to the haunts of his useful industry and his life-long labours, associated with all the venerable relics of surrounding antiquity, and serving to date also the enterprising efforts of modern improvement. There let it stand, close to that stream which floats on its tide the nightly commerce of the British empire—that commerce to whose infant expansion he contributed—close to those halls of the legislature, which, by their ancient recollections, and by their modern splendour, are worthy of the country, and of their own exalted destination; above all, close to that famous abbey which has raised its requiem over so many immortal names—names which no one has done more than William Caxton to make the heirlooms of our British glory.

The dean of Westminster and Mr. John Murray moved the formal resolution that a national testimonial was desirable.

America next spoke, and spoke well too in the person of Mr. Banerisi, her minister, who moved "That the proper site of any work of art would be at the west front of Westminster Abbey, at the end of the new Victoria-street."

Mr. Bancroft said, to an American in England the name of Westminster Abbey called up all the most pleasing associations. As he crossed the Atlantic to visit the homes of his fathers, nothing so appealed to his heart as the cathedrals and ancient churches of England, and, foremost of all, Westminster Abbey. It appeared to them, pilgrims of the West, as if these ancient sanctuaries gathered around them to enwrap them and speak a welcome, and as if they called them into the presence of all that was greatest and most glorious in the recollection of English history and the English mind. Westminster Abbey was the site most suitable for the erection of a monument to the memory of William Caxton—Westminster Abbey, where lay deposited the remains of kings, warriors, and statesmen—the front of Westminster Abbey, where the sun, descending in the far west, casts his last shadow on the most remarkable building in their island,—that was the spot to be selected as the site for the monument of one well skilled in mechanical art, and who made himself glorious because he connected himself with the love of persevering and indomitable industry, not for his own aggrandizement, but for the benefit of the European world, and of the human race. A monument to Caxton, the first man who made the songs of the English poets the common property of the world—a monument to Caxton, who first gave to the songs of Chaucer a current and circulation as wide as that of the English tongue, led the way for teaching the sons of industry to understand the noble works of Milton and Shakespeare, and employed the English tongue to